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## **The Role of The MPU In Preventing Violations of Islamic Law**

**Helmi<sup>1\*</sup>, Nofriadi<sup>2</sup>, Afrijal<sup>3</sup>, Nurul Kamaly<sup>4</sup>, Wira Auna Ghina<sup>5</sup>, Nurmalisa H. Chawari<sup>6</sup>**

<sup>1-5</sup> Syiah Kuala University, Aceh Province, Indonesia

<sup>6</sup> Institute of Home Affairs Governance, West Java, Indonesia

\*Correspondence : [helmi\\_fisip@usk.ac.id](mailto:helmi_fisip@usk.ac.id)

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### **Abstract**

This study comprehensively examines the role of the Majelis Permusyawaratan Ulama (MPU) in preventing violations of Islamic Sharia, with a focused case study in Aceh. The research is guided by institutional governance theory and conflict mediation concepts. The study traces the historical development of Islam in Aceh, the rationale behind establishing MPU, and the multifaceted challenges faced by the government and the ulama in enforcing Sharia law. Employing a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews with key MPU members (Ustadz M. Khalis and Ustadz M. Husen), document analysis, and extensive field observations across various strategic areas in Aceh. Findings indicate that MPU, as an authoritative and consultative council of ulama, plays a critical role in interpreting Islamic law, issuing fatwas on issues such as khalwat and public morality, advising governmental bodies, and facilitating public deliberation forums to manage interpretative conflicts. Moreover, MPU functions as a mediator between state and society in Sharia-related issues, ensuring that policies are reflective of both traditional values and contemporary socio-political needs. Strategic recommendations include enhancing institutional capacity, implementing robust oversight mechanisms, and formulating adaptive, inclusive policies that resonate with present-day cultural and technological advancements.

**Keywords:** Aceh, Islamic Sharia, MPU



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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Aceh is known as one of the regions in Indonesia with a deep-rooted Islamic history and a significant role in the spread of Islam throughout the Archipelago since the 13th century (Azizah et al., 2025; Gedacht, 2021; Herliyanto et al., 2025). Since the era of the Aceh Sultanate, Islamic scholars (*ulama*) have played a vital role not only as religious leaders but also as advisors in formulating policies and norms that form the foundation of Acehnese socio-political life (Firnanda et al., 2025; Rasyidin, 2020). This historical journey has witnessed the development of various Islamic traditions, in which the values of deliberation (*musyawarah*) and collective discourse have become integral components of decision-making processes (Fachrurrozy et al., 2025). In response to the dynamics of modernization and globalization, which have brought significant changes to social structures and governance, there arose a need to align public policies with the deeply ingrained Islamic values in Aceh (Hirzi et al., 2025). It was in this context that the Majelis Permusyawaratan Ulama (MPU), or the Consultative Council of Ulama, was established



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to accommodate the aspirations of religious scholars and serve as a bridge between the government and society.

The MPU was born from the long-standing tradition of musyawarah inherited from the era of the Aceh Sultanate, and it has evolved to address the increasingly complex challenges in the implementation of Islamic Law (Sharia) in the contemporary era (Abubakar, 2019; Nurdin et al., 2018). Several previous studies have examined the implementation of Islamic Law (Sharia) in Aceh and the strategic role of ulama in shaping public policy. (Ismail & Manan, 2014) describes the reality of qanun (Islamic bylaw) implementation in Aceh and the community's response, emphasizing that historical legitimacy and socio-cultural factors play crucial roles in determining the level of public acceptance of Sharia-based policies. (Abubakar, 2019) Highlight Aceh's special asymmetric autonomy, in which close collaboration between the regional government and the Majelis Permusyawaratan Ulama (MPU) enables the formulation of qanun based on the consensus of local ulama, allowing public policies to reflect local religious values better. Meanwhile, the Aceh Provincial Office of Islamic Sharia (2012), in its report Implementation of Islamic Sharia in Aceh as a Special Autonomy, emphasizes the importance of strengthening institutions and coordination among agencies, including the MPU, Wilayatul Hisbah (Sharia enforcement agency), and the Public Order Police (Satpol PP), in consistently and integratively enforcing Jinayat (criminal) law.

In these works (Abbas, 2018b) explores the philosophical foundations of maqāṣid al-syarī'ah, emphasizing that every Sharia regulation should balance spiritual interests with social welfare to maintain community harmony. (Raziqin, 2021) evaluates the implementation of Sharia in Banda Aceh from the perspective of the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI), revealing how Sharia norms are interpreted and adapted by specific groups in their daily practices (Juliana, 2020) compares data on Sharia enforcement from 2016–2019, finding that the increased frequency of MPU plenary deliberations and community outreach strategies significantly reduced cases of khalwat (seclusion between unmarried men and women). Lastly, (Abbas, 2018a) compiles various academic perspectives and ulama fatwas, showing that transparency and accountability in qanun formulation have improved thanks to the MPU's central role as a forum for legitimacy and the unification of Sharia interpretations.

The implementation of Islamic Law in Aceh faces a variety of complex historical and structural challenges (Nasrullah et al., 2024). Differences in interpretation between the government and the ulama often become a source of conflict that hinders policy consistency, compounded by disparities in educational backgrounds, religious experiences, and diverse political interests (Ismail & Manan, 2014; Juliana, 2020). In addition, limited access to adequate information among segments of society further



widens the gap between enacted policies and public expectations. This phenomenon is compounded by the dynamics of local politics, which are often marked by competing interests and by decisions frequently influenced by the power of particular political groups. Moreover, the pressures of modernization and globalization introduce technological changes, urban migration, and exposure to external cultural norms (Dũng & Thành, 2025; Yeganeh, 2024). These pressures create challenges for MPU in consistently enforcing Sharia, as they require balancing inherited Islamic norms with evolving social expectations (Abbas, 2018b; Raziqin, 2021). Conservative groups often resist changes that may conflict with their cultural and religious identity.

Within this framework, this study aims to comprehensively explore the role of the MPU in preventing violations of Islamic Law by examining historical, structural, and socio-political dynamics. The study employs institutional governance theory (Muslih & Firmansyah, 2015) as the conceptual lens to analyze how MPU mediates between state mechanisms and societal norms in Sharia enforcement.

## **2. METHOD**

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach to analyze field-based phenomena and obtain an in-depth understanding of the institutional role of the Majelis Permusyawaratan Ulama (MPU) in preventing violations of Islamic Law in Aceh. More specifically, this research adopts a qualitative case study design. The case study method was selected because it allows for an intensive and contextual exploration of institutional dynamics, interpretative processes, and coordination mechanisms within real-life governance settings. The focus of the case study is on the MPU of Banda Aceh City, a strategic institutional arena where religious authority, regional government, and Sharia enforcement agencies interact directly.

The research was conducted between January and March 2024 in Banda Aceh, the administrative capital of Aceh Province. Banda Aceh was purposively selected for its central role in Sharia governance, where fatwa formulation, qanun implementation, and enforcement coordination are structurally concentrated. As the capital city, Banda Aceh provides a representative institutional setting for examining preventive governance mechanisms. Data collection was carried out through three primary techniques: in-depth interviews, documentary analysis, and field observation.

First, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with key institutional actors. Two principal informants were selected through purposive sampling: Ustadz M. Khalis and Ustadz M. Husen, both senior members of the MPU Banda Aceh. Ustadz M. Khalis is actively involved in the Education and Research Division, while Ustadz M. Husen plays a significant role in deliberation forums and advisory coordination. These



informants were chosen because of their direct involvement in fatwa deliberation, policy consultation, and coordination with Sharia enforcement agencies such as Wilayatul Hisbah (WH) and SATPOL PP. Their positions provide direct access to institutional insights regarding preventive strategies, interpretative conflict management, and advisory mechanisms within Sharia governance.

Second, documentary analysis was conducted by reviewing qanun regulations, official government reports, MPU fatwas, policy archives, and relevant academic literature on the implementation of Islamic Law in Aceh. This analysis was intended to situate interview findings within the broader legal and institutional framework governing Sharia enforcement. Third, field observations were conducted at the MPU office in Banda Aceh, several major mosques, and selected dayah (Islamic boarding schools). These locations were chosen because they represent key spaces of religious deliberation, outreach activities, and public engagement. Observations focused on institutional communication patterns, public interaction during religious activities, and informal preventive education efforts delivered through sermons and study sessions.

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis, involving stages of data reduction, coding, categorization, and interpretation. Through this analytical process, several core themes were identified, including interpretative differences, institutional fragmentation, preventive strategies, governance coordination, and public communication dynamics. In addition, a SWOT analysis was used to systematically map the MPU's institutional strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats related to its preventive function. To ensure credibility and validity, source triangulation was implemented by comparing interview data with documentary findings and observational results. Member checking was also conducted to verify the accuracy of interpretations with the key informants.

### **3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

Aceh's long history as a center of Islamic civilization has given rise to a deeply rooted tradition of musyawarah (deliberation). During the era of the Aceh Sultanate, ulama played a central role not only in spreading Islamic teachings but also in serving as royal advisors in policy formulation. This tradition of musyawarah naturally inspired the establishment of the Majelis Permusyawaratan Ulama (MPU), which was designed to unify the perspectives of scholars within a comprehensive and integrated institutional framework.

The formation of the MPU was a response to the growing need to align Islamic values with governmental policies amid significant social and political changes. The MPU functions not only as a consultative body but also as a mechanism for formulating fatwas



and recommendations that can serve as policy references for the government. The strong tradition of collective decision-making embedded in Acehese culture has become the MPU's main strength, making it a form of religious innovation that remains relevant in addressing the challenges of modernization.

However, the implementation of Islamic Law (Sharia) in Aceh faces multifaceted challenges, ranging from interpretative differences between the government and ulama to infrastructural limitations in inter-agency communication. Divergent interpretations of Sharia often arise due to the varied academic backgrounds and religious experiences of the parties involved. These differences can lead to conflict during the drafting of regulations, resulting in policies that are inconsistent or not fully accepted by all stakeholders.

Additionally, limited access to information and uneven distribution of resources have become significant obstacles. Many communities, particularly those in remote areas, lack adequate information or understanding about the Sharia-based policies being implemented. Fragmented communication systems between the MPU, government apparatus, and the public contribute to these information gaps, ultimately lowering public participation in the policy-making process. Local political dynamics also play a crucial role in hindering the effective implementation of Islamic Law. In some regions, the political interests of dominant groups tend to overshadow the voices of ulama and the broader community. Meanwhile, pressures from modernization and globalization continue to challenge traditional values, as social and technological changes demand policy reformulations that remain adaptive without compromising the essence of Islamic principles.

#### **a. The Strategic Role of The MPU in Addressing Violations**

This study employed a qualitative case study approach to explore in depth the role of the Majelis Permusyawaratan Ulama (MPU) of Banda Aceh City in preventing violations of Islamic Law (Sharia). Data collection involved in-depth interviews with two key MPU members, Ustadz M. Khalis and Ustadz M. Husen, who focus on education and research, along with document analysis of Aceh qanun regulations and policy archives, and field observations conducted at the MPU office, major mosques, and several dayah (Islamic boarding schools) in Banda Aceh.

Thematic data analysis identified core issues such as differences in qanun interpretation, institutional fragmentation among Sharia enforcement agencies, and communication barriers. A SWOT framework was also applied to map the MPU's strengths (the religious legitimacy of the ulama), weaknesses (limited budget and technical capacity), opportunities (support from digital technology), and threats (local



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political resistance). Interview findings emphasized that the MPU functions as a consultative authority, not an executive one, in Sharia enforcement. As Ustadz Khalis explained:

"The MPU of Banda Aceh adheres to the Aceh qanun in enforcing Islamic Law. The existing provisions must be carried out to ensure compliance with regulations, which is the duty of district and municipal MPUs."

This statement highlights the MPU's role as a provider of fatwas and policy recommendations. When violations such as khalwat (unmarried seclusion) occur, the MPU issues advice and recommends sanctions, while Wilayatul Hisbah (WH) and SATPOL PP execute the physical enforcement. This division of labor ensures legal accountability and procedural discipline but also presents coordination challenges. Fragmentation of authority becomes more evident when examining violation-handling procedures. The presence of multiple actors, MPU, WH, SATPOL PP, and the Office of Islamic Law often leads to inconsistencies in field operations. According to Ustadz Husen,

"The government executes actions after consulting the MPU."

However, in practice, differences in qanun interpretation persist, stemming from the varied educational and religious backgrounds of ulama and enforcement officers. The lack of integrated communication channels further exacerbates the issue: rural communities often receive inadequate information about Sharia regulations, resulting in low levels of public participation in deliberation and reporting processes. Another important aspect is public perception outside Aceh, which often becomes problematic due to media distortion of Sharia enforcement. During the National Sports Week (PON) event, concerns eased after MPU was invited by the Banda Aceh Police and the Tourism Office to clarify Sharia mechanisms (field observation & interview with Ustadz Khalis, 2024).

"It turned out there were no negative comments during the event; lost phones were returned safely, market prices remained stable, and social life was peaceful"

This moment illustrates the importance of transparency and cross-sector dialogue in reducing stigma and misconceptions. In such a complex context, the MPU's role becomes strategically vital as a balancing and mediating institution. The MPU works to unify differing interpretations through structured musyawarah (deliberation) forums, enabling consensus in Sharia interpretation. These forums allow ulama from diverse backgrounds to engage in intensive discussions and find common ground on emerging religious and social issues. The process not only produces theoretical insights but also



leads to concrete outputs, fatwas and policy recommendations that the government can use to align Sharia implementation with real-world conditions.

Moreover, the MPU serves as a facilitator of coordination among government institutions, religious scholars, and the public. By leveraging information technology and developing an integrated e-governance system, the MPU ensures that deliberative outcomes and recommendations are transmitted transparently and promptly. Effective coordination is crucial to overcoming the communication fragmentation that has long hindered the implementation of Sharia. Through an integrated communication network, the MPU strengthens institutional relationships and accelerates responses to emerging policy issues. Beyond coordination, MPU acts as an active oversight body. In its supervisory role, MPU continuously monitors government implementation of Sharia-based policies through a structured monitoring system. This data was collected from both interviews with MPU members and field observations at the MPU office.

Thus, the MPU can deliver timely feedback and encourage corrective mechanisms whenever discrepancies arise. This monitoring role also provides a foundation for policy reform advocacy, whereby the MPU urges the government to adjust regulations to become more flexible, adaptive, and responsive to social and technological changes ensuring that the enforcement of Islamic Law remains both principled and progressive. To better illustrate the MPU's institutional environment, Table 1 presents a SWOT analysis summarizing its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in preventing violations of Sharia law.

Table 1. SWOT Analysis Majelis Permusyawaratan Ulama (MPU) Banda Aceh

<b>Components</b>	<b>Description/Findings</b>
<b>Strengths (S)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Religious legitimacy and authority of ulama in Aceh society.</li><li>- Strong tradition of musyawarah (deliberation).</li><li>- Central role in fatwa issuance and advisory functions.</li><li>- Bridge between government and society.</li></ul>
<b>Weaknesses (W)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Limited budget for outreach, workshops, and seminars.</li><li>- Restricted technical and digital capacity.</li><li>- Fragmented communication channels between MPU, WH, Satpol PP, and the public.</li></ul>
<b>Opportunities (O)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Support from digital technology for e-governance and communication.</li><li>- Potential to build a communication network among ulama across Aceh.</li><li>- Growing public interest in participatory policy-making.</li></ul>
<b>Threats (T)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Local political resistance or conflicting interests.</li></ul>



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- Divergent interpretations of Sharia among ulama and enforcement agencies.
  - Public misperception of Sharia enforcement (e.g., media distortion).
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## **b. Implementation of Innovation and Strategic Ideas**

The analysis reveals that innovative approaches are essential to address the current challenges in Sharia implementation. One of the key strategic ideas is the development of an e-governance system capable of utilizing digital technology to monitor policy implementation in real time. This system would ensure that every aspect of Sharia enforcement is accurately recorded and evaluated, allowing obstacles to be identified and resolved promptly. Moreover, the integration of technology strengthens transparency and accountability, thereby enhancing public trust in the policies being implemented.

In terms of education and public outreach, the MPU faces two major challenges: limited funding and restricted access to modern media. Officially, the MPU's budget allocation only covers minimal operational needs, leaving little room for field activities such as workshops and seminars. Nevertheless, MPU members remain active informally through Friday sermons, lectures, and pengajian (religious study sessions) held in dayah (Islamic boarding schools). As Ustadz Husen noted:

“Individually, MPU members are active through sermons and dayah, but there is no funding for seminars or training programs.”

In the digital era, the MPU has begun using its official website and WhatsApp groups to disseminate fatwas and tausiyah (religious advice). However, the frequency and reach remain limited relative to the potential of broader social media engagement. Another innovative proposal is to create a comprehensive communication network connecting the ulama across various regions of Aceh. Such a network would allow scholars to exchange perspectives, discuss interpretations collectively, and produce more representative policy recommendations. This network would also serve as a platform for resolving interpretive differences that have long been sources of institutional tension.

Furthermore, capacity building is critical for institutional strengthening. Intensive training programs for MPU members and government officers should focus on areas such as information technology, policy management, and strategic communication. By mastering these competencies, both the MPU and governmental bodies can collaborate more effectively to design and implement Sharia-based policies that align with Islamic values while responding to contemporary realities. Finally, the reformulation of Sharia



regulations through a participatory approach is expected to produce adaptive and inclusive policies. Involving ulama, the public, and academics in the policy-making process ensures that regulations are not only grounded in deep-rooted Islamic norms but also responsive to socio-political dynamics and technological advancement. This approach is vital in today's fast-changing era, ensuring that Sharia governance remains both principled and progressive in the face of modern challenges.

### **c. Policy Implications and Strategic Recommendations**

The findings of this study indicate that enhancing coordination between the government, the MPU, and ulama is crucial for formulating effective Sharia law policies in Aceh. These findings are consistent with previous studies, such as (Ismail & Manan, 2014) and (Juliana, 2020) which highlighted challenges in enforcement coordination and public participation. Therefore, several strategic recommendations are proposed to strengthen institutional performance, improve interagency communication, and modernize governance mechanisms through technological innovation.

First, institutional capacity building should be prioritized through regular training programs and the development of robust information technology systems. According to institutional governance theory (Muslih & Firmansyah, 2015), enhancing technical competence and organizational capability strengthens MPU's role as mediator and oversight body in Sharia governance. This recommendation is supported by interview data with MPU members (Ustadz Khalis & Ustadz Husen, 2024), which indicated that limited technical capacity restricts their ability to monitor and advise effectively.

Second, the implementation of an integrated e-governance system for Sharia is highly recommended. This unified platform would allow the public to report potential violations, access official fatwas, and monitor case progress in real time. The recommendation is based on field observations showing fragmented communication channels between the MPU, WH, Satpol PP, and communities in remote areas. Digitalization not only streamlines administrative processes but also fosters transparency, accountability, and public trust. Third, establishing a communication network among *dayah* (Islamic boarding schools) across Aceh, both offline and online, would create a sustainable forum for ulama to exchange insights and build interpretive consensus on *qanun* (regional Islamic regulations). This initiative addresses the interpretive fragmentation noted in both this study and (Abubakar, 2019), thereby promoting uniformity in Sharia enforcement. Interview data also confirmed that current communication is largely informal and inconsistent.

Fourth, a continuous professional development program for MPU members and Sharia enforcement officers is essential. Training modules should include information



technology, policy management, and strategic communication to improve coordination between MPU, WH, and Satpol PP. This aligns with the institutional governance framework, which emphasizes capacity building as a core element for effective preventive governance. Fifth, the establishment of a participatory qanun formulation mechanism is recommended. By involving community representatives, academics, and private-sector actors through workshops and public consultations, MPU and the government can ensure that every qanun reflects Islamic values while remaining adaptive to social realities. This recommendation aligns with (Abbas, 2018b), who emphasized that public engagement enhances the legitimacy and acceptance of Sharia regulations.

The policy implications of these recommendations include:

- Allocating a special budget for MPU outreach, training, and digital monitoring activities, addressing the funding limitations highlighted by Ustadz Husen.
- Creating a centralized Sharia data system that integrates information from MPU, WH, Satpol PP, and other agencies, reducing fragmentation in field data.
- Empowering village-level forums and official online platforms to channel public feedback and aspirations effectively, aligning with participatory governance principles.

Through multi-stakeholder synergy involving local government, religious institutions, academia, and civil society, Aceh can develop Sharia-based policies that are deeply rooted in religious traditions while remaining adaptive to globalization and technological advancement. Cross-referencing these recommendations with both field data and institutional governance theory demonstrates that integrating digital tools, capacity building, participatory mechanisms, and professional development strengthens MPU's preventive, mediating, and supervisory roles in the implementation of Sharia law. Finally, the reformulation of Sharia regulations through a participatory and inclusive approach ensures policies that are theologically grounded, socially responsive, and contextually relevant, reflecting the collective aspirations of the Acehnese people.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

Based on the review and analysis conducted, it can be concluded that the implementation of Sharia law in Aceh faces highly complex challenges, ranging from differences in religious interpretation and limited communication infrastructure to the dynamics of local politics. Aceh's deep Islamic history and long-standing tradition of consultation (musyawarah) have encouraged the establishment of the Majelis Permusyawaratan Ulama (MPU) as a key institution for managing interpretive differences and providing inclusive, adaptive policy recommendations. The MPU plays a



strategic role as mediator, facilitator, and supervisor in the enforcement of Sharia law, enabling the creation of public policies that balance traditional Islamic values with contemporary social developments. The findings emphasize that synergy among the government, MPU, ulama, and the community is essential to achieving social stability and legal certainty. Strategic recommendations such as the development of an integrated e-governance system, institutional capacity building, and participatory regulatory reform are expected to reduce potential conflicts, enhance transparency, and strengthen the overall implementation of Sharia law in Aceh.

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